

**MINUTES
HAZLETON CITY COUNCIL
WORK SESSION
TUESDAY, MARCH 23, 2021**

Council met for a WORK SESSION on Tuesday, March 23, 2021 via ZOOM Teleconferencing. The WORK SESSION began at 8:54 p.m.

In attendance were City Council President James Perry, Vice-President Anthony Colombo, Allison Barletta, Lauren Sacco and Jack Mundie. City Officials present were Mayor Jeff Cusat, Atty. Sean Logsdon, Fire Chief Donald Leshko, and Police Chief Brian Schoonmaker.

Perry said the only item, on the WORK SESSION, is the City of Hazleton Zoning Ordinance. He asked anyone for any comments or questions.

Barletta said there is one area, looking at the map, near Poplar Street, in the Heights area, that changed from residential, up by the Heritage shopping area, and cutting over one block, changing it from residential to general industrial. She asked what the reasoning is with this because there are a lot of tractor trailers and trash there. She said the residents are complaining. Mayor Cusat asked if she is talking about Oliver Court. She said it is right next to Kiefer Avenue and F Court. She said it is right off of Poplar Street, the first block. She said it took the one lot and made it general industrial. She said the rear of their houses, currently, are general industrial. Barletta said it is the rear of people's houses and the rear of Kiefer Avenue. She said it touches F Court, the rear of Kiefer Avenue, and rear of the Poplar Street's residents. Mayor Cusat asked if it is by the grass area where the place was knocked down. She said she does not know if there was a place there, but an empty grass area, next to the railroad tracks, where the tractor trailers are leaving their tires, garbage and trash. She said it is really bad with a big UGI gas pump station there. Mayor Cusat said this is the Dietrich Avenue area. Barletta said yes. She said it made her concerned with all the residents in this area and the tractor trailer, they are dealing with, currently, with the garbage, and the big UGI gas pump. Mayor Cusat said this piece of land may be contacted to the same landowner and to another piece. Barletta stated this was just changed in this one. Mayor Cusat said the engineers made up the map and should have been following property lines and streets. He said he cannot answer that but said he does know where she is talking about. He asked Barletta if it is by Hajoca. Barletta said yes. She asked if they could look at it to see why. Mayor Cusat said he will have to review the property line there. Mundie asked if someone would challenge this for spot zoning. Atty. Logsdon said he does not believe so but will look into this and see why it was changed.

Mayor Cusat asked if the City is ready to move forward on the new Zoning Ordinance.

Mundie asked how the City's Land Bank is going. Mayor Cusat said he has people for the Redevelopment office and had two meetings today for the Land Bank. He said he will tell city council members, when he is ready, for the appointments. He stated city council needs to appoint two people, he needs to appoint two members, and the other three are "plopped into place" by statute. He said this should be in about a month, around the next city council meeting on April 27th. Mayor Cusat stated there is a webinar, on March 26th, regarding Land Banks. Barletta asked if a city council member could be appointed. Mayor Cusat said no public official is allowed. Perry stated the City could move on with this.

Perry asked if the City is enforcing the occupancy permits and how does the City know if this is being checked. Perry stated the City passed this ordinance. He said this is the realtor's responsibility and be held accountable. He stated all these buildings are being sold. Mayor Cusat said he signed the City up for the MY GOV software for the Code Department. He said it is about a three-month process. He stated Gary will "head this up" and put together the computer processing. He said this will help track all these properties. Perry asked if there is a fine for this. Mayor Cusat he thinks it is about \$350,000. Perry stated it does not take much to sign the document, are being lazy, and transactions are happening every day.

He said it was a reputable realtor. He said they need to remind them. Mayor Cusat said the City needs to start sending out fines for not doing it. Perry asked how the City would find out if these were done. Mayor Cusat stated the City gets a list, from the county, of all the properties that were transferred. He said he does not know how far behind it is. He stated this is compared to the occupancy inspections that were done. Perry said there is a lot of money out there. He said, after they “get word” they will follow this. Sacco asked if someone, from the City, should have come to her before she signed everything with Lewith & Freeman. Mayor Cusat stated the abstract company is responsible. He said, according to the ordinance, the abstract company is responsible to having this occupancy permit, in the packet, before the closing. He said anyone who purchases should not be able to close without an occupancy. Perry said it is their responsibility to get this. Mayor Cusat said they could close but get fined for it. Sacco said the person from the City would not be involved with the person buying the property. Mayor Cusat said, eventually, someone would catch up to them, cannot occupy the building, and then, have a problem. Sacco said they told her, “everything is taken care of”. Sacco said nobody from the Code Department walked through the building. Perry asked if the City needs to send letters to the abstract companies. Mayor Cusat said they discussed this today and will be reaching out to the abstract associations. Sacco asked what the fine is. Perry said he thinks it is more than \$100.00. Sacco said she hopes this gets their attention.

Atty. Logsdon said he will be doing the advertising and the public hearing for the new Zoning Ordinance. He said there will be recommendations from the county, recommendations from the City’s Planning Commission, and any edits they make, and a public hearing. He said all this will come back in front of city council. Barletta asked if the public hearing is in front of city council. Atty. Logsdon said yes; the public hearing is front of “you guys”.

Sacco said Krista Schneider and Mary Malone reached out to city council. She stated Earth Day is April 24th. They said, last year, city council did clean-ups. She said Mike Cammissa ran this, in 2020, and committed to dates and the whole “nine yards”. Sacco said Cammissa composed a nice letter to reach out to the football teams, basketball teams, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts or any group that needs non-profit hours. She said the clean-up will be the last Saturday, of every month, from April to November. She said this is supposed to be a “year-round” thing. She said there will be something called “The Battle of the Block” with SSP-TV and the newspaper working, with them, hopefully, to take pictures of the blighted areas, to embarrass them into it. She stated when they see “The Battle of the Block”, they should be embarrassed enough to clean up their spot after they clean it. She said the business section will take two blocks to the right, two blocks to the left, and two blocks in front. Sacco said they asked her about garbage cans. She said she will talk to “We Are Hazleton”, as a group. Sacco said they are starting to acquire funds. She said they could price out garbage cans and put one on every corner. She said they asked her who would be responsible for the providing the trash bags. Mayor Cusat said in the new Business Ordinance, if it is a retail business, it states they need to have a garbage can at their entrance, to maintain on their own. Perry asked inside or outside of their business. Mayor Cusat said outside their business. He said anything sold in a bag needs a garbage can. Sacco said they also asked who would be responsible for picking up the garbage. Mayor Cusat said they would be responsible. He said they tried to work with the Downtown Chamber, in 2020, to have them ask the businesses to bag the garbage and put it out but did not work out. He said this is why this was put in the Business Ordinance.

Perry asked if the mini-VAC truck was out this week. Mayor Cusat said he does not know.

Leshko suggested to residents to start sweeping off their sidewalks and get it out there in English and Spanish. He said he and Vito have been looking at some streets to try to do some washing. He said there is a lot of dirt and garbage out there. He said it took them all of Saturday and Sunday to do Broad Street and wash sidewalks. He said some sections needed shovels to clean all the garbage off the sidewalks. He asked everyone to put a “plug out there” through social media to get the word out. Mayor Cusat said if some sweeps their sidewalks, it needs to be pushed 18 inches, into the streets, and no piles.

Leshko stated they will get more streets done, than last year, once the bulk of the sweeping is done, but is trying to get the main thorough fares, done, in the City, to make it look more presentable.

Colombo said there will be signs posted 24-48 hours prior to the cleaning. He stated this was in the newspaper in 2020. Mayor Cusat stated residents should sweep their sidewalks now.

Perry adjourned the WORK SESSION meeting at 9:11 p.m.